

THE CASE FOR CHEMICAL EXPORT CONTROLS

by
Representative Charles B. Rangel
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One of the profoundly disturbing and dangerous legacies of American involvement in the Indochina War may be the advent of the age of chemical warfare. For eight years, until 1970, the United States employed the now - infamous "Agent Orange," a teratogenic (fetus-damaging) herbicide in Southeast Asia. Wisconsin Senator Gaylord Nelson, testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in March, 1971 reported that:

"Between 1962 and 1970, the most recent year for which full data is available, approximately 23,360 square kilometers (5,767,410 acres), or nearly one-seventh of the total land area of South Vietnam was treated with chemical herbicides in order to reduce vegetation and to destroy crops. (This is an area about the size of Massachusetts). To accomplish this task, it is estimated that more than 100 million pounds of herbicide, or about 6 pounds for every inhabitant, were sprayed on Vietnam."

Experts estimate that this chemical spraying caused the destruction of enough food to feed approximately 600,000 persons for a year.

Besides inflicting immediate damage upon the land, crops and people of Indochina, Agent Orange may very well have caused genetic damage to the Vietnamese people for generations to come. Recent newspaper accounts and scientific studies clearly illuminate this depressing possibility.

(From the New York Times, April 6, 1973)
Contamination Of Vietnam River Fish Laid To Defoliant

"Two Harvard biochemists have found that a component of a defoliant chemical used by United States forces in South Vietnam has contaminated fish and shellfish in Vietnamese waters and they say it may pose long-term hazards for the human population."

(From the Daily News, May 2, 1973)
South Viet Shrimp Called Tainted by Defoliant

"Japanese newspapers have quoted a South Vietnamese botanist as saying that marine life in the South China Sea has been contaminated by defoliant chemicals dropped on forests by American planes during the Vietnam war."

Quite recently, we have learned of the increasing use of toxic herbicides by North and South Vietnamese forces since the cease-fire accords.

(From the Daily News, May 4, 1973)
Cambo Rebels Use Toxic Gas To Take Post

"Cambodian forces, attacking behind a 'toxic gas' barrage, overran two battalions of government troops at an outpost southeast of Phnom Penh, killing 20 and capturing 580 others who were disabled by the gas, military sources said today."

(From the New York Times, May 9, 1973)
Vietcong Say Saigon Sprayed Chemicals

"The Vietcong charged today that Saigon troops fighting in a Communist-held area had sprayed toxic chemicals that 'ruined' more than 1,500 acres of land and caused serious illness to 'large numbers of persons'."

The American chemical program was terminated in December, 1970 after studies by the National Cancer Institute showed that the administration of herbicide to mice produced abnormal fetuses. Tragically, however, the damage had already been done. Further, the Vietnamese have learned quickly and thoroughly the American way of war.

Use of U.S. Herbicides by Portugal and the Republic of South Africa

It has recently come to my attention that the excessive amount of chemical herbicides that the United States government and private business sell to Portugal and South Africa is being used to continue and intensify the colonial warfare in the Portuguese colonies of Angola and Mozambique.

It appears that Portuguese and South African airplanes are perpetrating a massive spraying of food crops, particularly cassava, to stifle support for the liberation movement that is rapidly growing among farmers and peasants in Angola and Mozambique.

A recent interview with members of the Angola liberation movement dealt with these tactics of chemical warfare:

The Portuguese began dropping bombs this year (1970) - in April. Chemicals were dropped first on the fields - mainly cassava fields, but also other crops, whatever was visible. After the chemicals were dropped, destroying sweet potatoes and other crops, the Portuguese continued dropping chemicals, and bombs, which affected the people. About 30 persons have died as a result of these chemicals. This was the first time we saw such airplanes. Some of the airplanes came low, and others flew above. They sprayed something over the fields. The next morning we discovered our cassava plants were dried out; they were rotten."

An official of the Zambian government, in a June 23rd, 1971 letter to the United Nations simply stated that:

"The use of chemical warfare for the purpose of starving the population in liberated zones of Angola is now a fact accepted by the most authoritative organs of the western press...."

More recently, on August 23, 1972, the Times of Zambia reported that approximately 1,300 Angolans had fled across the border into Zambia seeking food after the poisonous destruction of their crops.

African-interest groups such as the Washington Office on Africa and the American Committee on Africa have sought to document and publicize this horrid affair. In their November, 1972 newsletter, the Washington group reported American involvement in the supplying of these chemicals for use in the African war.

Though we have been peddling herbicides to the governments of Portugal and South Africa since 1965, Department of Commerce figures show a sharp increase in sales since 1969:

U.S. Sale of Herbicides

<u>1969:</u>	<u>Value (in dollars)</u>
Republic of South Africa	\$1,200,516
Portugal	\$ 57,330
<u>1970:</u>	
Republic of South Africa	\$2,735,596
Portugal	\$ 343,980
<u>1971:</u>	
Republic of South Africa	\$3,623,896
Portugal	\$ 114,660

It is interesting to note that this rise in chemical sales paralleled the relaxation of export regulations pertaining to 2,4,5-T herbicide. For in 1970, this herbicide was taken from the control of the Office of Munitions Control in the State Department and placed within the purview of the Department of Commerce as a civilian commodity.

As we were beating our swords into ploughshares, the Portuguese and South Africans were planning and implementing the reverse.

Questions of Law

I am not only incensed about U.S. involvement in this African war on moral and ethical grounds, but it is also clear to me that our chemical sales violate the precepts of international law.

Though the herbicides-in-question were shortsightedly removed from the munitions list three years ago, the 2,4,5-T sales are clearly transgressing the 1961 embargo of military material to Portugal and South Africa established under the Kennedy Administration.

We are also violating the spirit and intent of the embargo created by the Security Council of the United Nations on August 7, 1973 which...

"Solemnly calls upon all States to cease forthwith the sale and shipment of arms, ammunition of all types and military vehicles to South Africa."

According to Article Six of the 1961 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Agreement, the Portuguese government must submit written assurance to the U.S. that any munitions purchased will be employed exclusively in NATO areas. Angola and Mozambique are not members of NATO. (Remember too that in 1961, 2,4,5-T herbicide was on the State Department's munitions list).

The past fifty years, immediately following World War I, have seen a proliferation of protocols and resolutions adopted condemning the involvement, in any form, of nations in chemical aggressions. Included among these are the Washington Conference Resolutions of 1922 and the Geneva Protocol of 1925. The United States, by supplying the weapons of war to racist nations such as Portugal and South Africa, is unquestionably violating the meaning and intent of these and other declarations.

Most interesting and insightful is United Nations Resolution 2603A (XXIV) adopted by the U.N. General Assembly on December 16, 1966, which declares chemical warfare as being "contrary to generally recognized rules of international law." The resolution was agreed to by a vote of eighty to three. The three dissenting nations were Australia, Portugal and the United States. (Australia was involved in chemical aggression in Indochina).

Chemicals To South America?

In the supposed interests of developing markets and improving our balance of payments, the U.S. government has been considering selling or giving away its supply of Agent Orange to South American governments, according to a recent article in Science Magazine, the publication of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. One of the nations especially interested in obtaining these cans of chemicals is Brazil, which is presently conducting "clearing" operations and relocating natives in the northwestern part of the country. Obviously, the herbicides will assist the Brazilian government in its operations, considered to be "paramilitary" by an unnamed herbicide expert.

Chemicals Controlled: At Home

In the Spring of 1970, decisive steps were taken by the Department of Agriculture in relation to the use of 2,4,5-T herbicides.

In its notice to manufacturers, formulators, distributors and registrants, the D.A. said:

"Recent studies by the National Environmental Health Service of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare have shown that the subcutaneous administration of high concentrations of the purest samples of 2,4,5-T that are practical to manufacture at the present time produce a significant number of fetal abnormalities in mice."

"....the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare has advised the Secretary of Agriculture that exposure to this herbicide may present an imminent health hazard to women of child-bearing age...."

On this basis, 2,4,5-T products were banned for use:

- I. In lakes, ponds or on ditch banks.
- II. Around the home, recreation areas and similar sites.
- III. On food crops intended for human consumption.

Last May, the Environmental Protection Agency banned the dumping of Agent Orange and other chemical substances in the ocean.

Chemicals unfit for use in this country should not be peddled abroad. When the chemicals are used as instruments of violence, it is clearly time for decisive action.

In a March 13th letter, I sought to apprise President Nixon of how American chemicals are being put to use in Southern Africa. I called upon the President to order the immediate cessation of all sales of herbicides to Portugal and South Africa. No action has, as yet, been taken.

It is clear to me that letters and cries of public outrage will not affect current policy.

Legislation Before Congress

That is why I have introduced two pieces of legislation in the House of Representatives designed to halt the exportation of poisonous chemicals.

"The Herbicide Export Control Act of 1973" will prohibit the exportation of 2,4,5-T herbicide.

"The Chemical Warfare Prevention Act of 1973" will immediately ban the sale of herbicides to Portugal and the Republic of South Africa.

Obviously, the chemicals that are being exported are no more than a drop in the enormously large bucket of American trade and foreign commerce.

But to the citizens of Angola and Mozambique, these chemicals are the fodder for the brutal aggression being waged against them. To the concerned and caring members of the world community, these exports stain the good name and reputation of the United States.

By allowing and continuing the exportation of dangerous chemicals that are only effective and useful in war, we are fast leading our planet towards physical and moral degradation.

It is clearly time to assert sanity and compassion in American economic and foreign policy. It is clearly time to blunt the reality that is, and the potential that exists for chemical warfare. It is to this end that my legislative endeavors and proposals are aimed.

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